

Secretary of State for Housing, Sajid Javid, writes for today's...

I want to build more beautiful houses

Affordable housing does not have to be poorly made – and it must take local communities into account

SAJID JAVID



Whether they're buying or renting, living in the private sector or in social housing, everyone cares about what their home and local neighbourhood look like and how they make us feel. Look no further. As Winston Churchill once said: "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us."

Design quality is not just something that is nice to have if you can afford it and know your Le Corbusier from your Ebenezer Howard: it is fundamental to everyone's quality of life. So when it comes to delivering the homes our country desperately needs, I don't believe there should be a trade-off between quantity, quality and affordability. That's why we are holding a design conference today that will bring together more than 400 experts from across the industry to ensure that, when we build more homes, we also build better homes.

From the elegant squares and crescents of the Georgian period to modern town houses, via Victorian terraces and the garden suburbs of the 20th century, Britain is a world leader in housing and design. Now we have to consider how we can leave the current generation with a strong legacy and an inspiring vision of what we want our villages, towns and cities to look and feel like in years to come. Today's new build is, potentially, tomorrow's period property.

With that in mind, it is even more important that the industry has a chance to showcase great examples of well-designed development, not just focusing on trying to meet short-term housing targets but aiming to become a much-loved part of the fabric of local areas. These include *Beauty in My Backyard*, from the Prince's Foundation – or *Nirby*. A more positive variation on *Nirby*, it really sums up what we all want from new homes, which is ultimately somewhere we are proud to live in and next door to. This is essentially what good design comes down to.

With fresh generations of first-time buyers expecting the highest-quality homes before parting with their hard-earned deposits, and developers wanting to win over communities ahead of building the homes our country needs, better quality design has never been so important.

This is about much more than just considering whether high-rise blocks are "skyscrapers". It's about whether development is in keeping with, and supported by, local communities, and ensuring that it has real character. No one wants to live in or live next door to brick boxes that could be anywhere, and there is no reason why they should have to.

Britain has always been a trailblazer for world-class design. And now there is new technology that could help us build more homes faster, while also keeping quality high and offering people choice, including through modern methods of construction such as modular homes.

As we consider what our legacy to the 21st century should be, we have to take into account the wants and needs not just of the next generation but future generations. Is it a legacy that allows our children and grandchildren to enjoy the same opportunities to prosper and put down roots as we did?

Are we being as bold and ambitious as we should be in meeting the challenges of our age?

The Government is playing its part. Last month, the Prime Minister and I announced planning reforms that strengthened the expectations for design quality and community engagement. This means that any plans for new housing developments need to give much more consideration to the character of the local area, so that what is being proposed complements what is already there and meets the needs and expectations of that community.

And the Government is backing this with £5 billion in funding to ensure that, ahead of building the homes, the existing community and potential new residents know roads, schools and other facilities will also be built.

We want to build on this work and encourage stronger collaboration across the industry, so that high-quality design is the norm, rather than the exception. But we recognise that this is an issue that is bigger than government and the housing sector. It is about how, in shaping the places where we live, we shape lives.

Sajid Javid is Secretary of State for Housing

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